FROM LEFT, CORINNE HARTMAN '22, NELS ANDERSON '78, JONATHAN KANTER '83, DAVID CURRY '82, JAMES IDELSON '80, ERIK THORENSEN, ARTHUR PIZER '79, SCOTT NACEY '83, EUGENE BALINSKI '80, ANDREW ABERDALE '89, CHAIR, WPI BOARD OF TRUSTEES, AND MEREDITH GAUTHIER '22

# **A Return to the Radio Shack:** Wireless Association Alumni Make a Connection

The university recently welcomed WPI Wireless Association (WPIWA) alumni back to campus. Student Alumni Society (SAS) members **Corinne Hartman '22** and **Meredith Gauthier '22** had the pleasure of leading the group on a memory-laden campus tour. The highlight for the group was the highly energized visit to the Wireless Association operating station. Also known as the Radio Shack, the tiny yet exhilarating space is all but hidden at the top of a steep staircase in Salisbury Laboratories. The Radio Shack features a door that only licensed and authorized radio operators may use to access WPI's prized antennas. The main antenna, known as W1YK, sits atop a 60' tower. The height of the tower combined with the height of the building affords W1YK some of the best wireless coverage in New England.

Founded in 1909, by Oliver K. Jacobs, WPIWA has the proud distinction of playing a formative role in the beginnings of Amateur Radio worldwide. The club's first station consisted of a transmitter running to a flat-top antenna and a receiver with a design centered around a detector. WPI established the first operational college radio station in the United States, and over the years, WPIWA has been at the forefront of radio technology. Today, W1YK is still experimenting in modern modes of Amateur Radio.

WPIWA alumnus **Gene Balinski '80** recently explained the impetus behind the group's informal campus reunion. "**Scott Nacey '83** contacted a fellow Wireless Association member in the area, as he was coming east from California to visit family. Scott wanted to take the opportunity to connect with fellow WPIWA members, and Worcester quickly became the choice meeting location. The initial discussion expanded into a possible campus visit, which, in turn, morphed into a visit to the Radio Shack—the frosting on the cake."

Balinski is currently a Raytheon communications lead for government defense programs. He works closely with government customers and soldiers to develop new communications systems and provide solutions to communications problems for global fielded systems. He describes his student experience at WPI as "... terrific. WPI is a great academic institution that gave me the tools to go as far as I wanted in both my career and my life. For me, it was great socially as well. Being able to walk to the Wireless Association Radio Shack (long before the advent of cell phones) and operate a well-equipped, powerful station allowing worldwide communication was a tremendous amount of fun and a great stress relief after a tough week of classes. My then girlfriend, now wife, remembers many Friday nights in the shack."

SAS Public Relations Chair Corinne Hartman '22 was happy to co-lead a tour for the WPIWA alumni. "Being a member of SAS has been a major part of my time at WPI and being able to engage and interact with the campus community is incredibly fun and very rewarding," she says. "One of my favorite activities, however, is interacting with alumni, because even across years and areas of study there is almost always something to learn and something we find in common."

About the WPIWA tour, Hartman shares, "The Alumni Wireless group members were all extremely passionate and excited about wireless communications and about WPI. They were all animated when sharing their knowledge of wireless communications and its history. They also shared stories of what student life was like when they were students and we got to compare what events still occur, hear about events that no longer exist, and share new events that have started since they graduated."

Hartman notes that seeing the WPIWA alumni reminisce about what had changed on campus and what stayed the same was especially exciting and gave her a meaningful glimpse back in time to what WPI was like when they were students.

Balinski echoes her enthusiasm about the visit: "Coming back to campus was absolutely incredible. It was really wonderful climbing the stairs again to the Salisbury roof-top Radio Shack. It brought back so many great memories. It seems cliché to say that so much has changed in the 40 years since I graduated, but it has, and as far as I could tell, all for the better. It made me want to be a student again."

Visit *https://users.wpi.edu/~wpiwa/* for more information on the WPI Wireless Association.

**—Sira Naras Frongillo**